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SUBJECT: ECUADOR-COLOMBIA TALKS ADVANCE ON BROAD RANGE OF ISSUES

Classified By: PolOff Jarahn Hillsman, Reasons 1.4 (b&d).

1. (C) Summary: The meeting between FM Francisco Carrion and his Colombian counterpart Carolina Barco which took place here on December 7 is being touted by the GOE and the Colombian Embassy here as a success. Both governments committed to increasing security measures along the border region, and revived bilateral dialogue mechanisms that had lain dormant under Carrion's bombastic predecessor. FM Barco confirmed the previous announcement that Colombia would temporarily suspend aerial glyphosate spraying and expand manual eradication units on the Ecuador-Colombia border. Barco also publicly agreed to a UN study of the alleged health implications of glyphosate and said that Bogota would solicit funding to help alleviate the Colombian refugee burden in Ecuador. End Summary.

Ambassador Encourages Progress

2. (C) The Ambassador spoke with FM Carrion on December 5 to reiterate USG concern about the glyphosate issue and express hope he would not press the GOC for more concessions, making sure he understood that this was a very important issue for the U.S. Carrion reiterated that he inherited this issue and was trying to manage it for President Palacio. He stressed that Ecuador was not pressing for a full 10 kilometer "free zone" for the FARC and others to cultivate right on their border. Carrion said he was looking for a way to neutralize this issue politically here. The Ambassador stressed that the USG could not support any outcome that gives credence to the notion that glyphosate is dangerous.

3. (U) The joint declaration issued on December 7 by the foreign ministers includes the following elements:

--Bi-national Border Development Plan: Both governments agreed to convene the Neighbor Commission in Quito in March of 2006 (it last met in February 2002). The commission will focus on improving socioeconomic conditions along the border region.

--Security: Both governments agreed to work towards enhancing their security posture along the border region, and commended the ministers of defense for their decision to meet in January 2006 to discuss border security.

--Anti-Narcotics: Both governments affirmed joint cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking and related illicit activity, and agreed to convene a bi-national Mixed Commission of anti-narcotics authorities in Bogota in February of 2006.

--Aerial Spraying: FM Barco confirmed the GOC's intent to temporarily suspend aerial fumigation within 10 kilometers of the Ecuadorian border beginning January 2006, and noted that the manual eradication units had been increased from four to fourteen. Both governments acknowledged that no agreement had been reached on the health effects of glyphosate, but that the GOC had "taken note of the Government of Ecuador's request that the UN conduct a prospective study of the issue and agreed to participate in the terms of reference of the same."

--Migration: Both governments agreed to review internal immigration issues and their implications for bilateral relations. They will convene a meeting on the issue in the first quarter of 2006.

--Refugees: FM Barco committed to soliciting international humanitarian assistance to help ease the Colombian refugee burden on Ecuador. Both governments agreed to work at the vice ministerial level with the UNHCR in the first quarter of 2006 to jointly solicit international assistance for Colombian refugees in Ecuador.

--Commerce: Both governments acknowledged that Colombia maintains a strongly favorable balance of trade with Ecuador, and committed to work towards a more equitable balance. They agreed to work together in their common dispute against the EU on bananas.

14. (U) During the joint press conference, Barco confirmed the suspension of spraying in January, but differed with the GOE about whether GOC security forces had violated Ecuadorian territory on November 11.

GOE Content

15. (C) On December 8, Ecuadorian Vice Foreign Minister Diego Ribadeneira told the DCM that the GOE was pleased with the outcome of the ministerial meeting, but lamented Colombia's refusal to permanently suspend aerial fumigation near Ecuadorian border settlements. Ribadeneira said that the GOC considers such an agreement unnecessary, as Colombian law already prohibits spraying within 100 meters of a human settlement. Furthermore, any such agreement would signal GOC agreement with the premise that glyphosate is not safe, which is unacceptable to the GOC. Ribadeneira said that the most promising outcome of the meeting was the commitment to renewed dialogue and cooperation on a range of issues through the bi-national committees.

Colombian Embassy Pleased

16. (C) The DCM and PolOffs met on December 8 with Colombian Deputy Chief of Mission Salvador Escobar, who said FM Barco was pleased with the outcome of her meetings in Quito. Carrion's arrival at the Ecuadorian MFA had sparked a new dialogue that will hopefully improve cooperation on a range of issues. Bogota welcomes the more professional, diplomatic approach of FM Carrion over former FM Parra, he said. He was hopeful that renewed dialogue, and the symbolic concessions made by the GOC, would give the GOE the political cover needed to advance on a more comprehensive bilateral agenda. Escobar noted that the FMs had reached agreement on key issues including border development, security, the global anti-narcotics fight, aerial spraying, migration, refugees, and commercial issues. The latter are specifically important to the GOE, given Colombia's very favorable trade balance (more than 2-1) with Ecuador.

Ambassador Comments on Spraying

17. (U) Asked by press on December 8 for the USG reaction to the Colombia accord on spraying, the Ambassador said that we would respect the agreement reached by the two countries, but stressed the importance of spraying as an essential tool in the common fight against narco-trafficking.

Comment

18. (C) We are encouraged that the two neighbors were able to reactivate their bilateral dialogue after unhelpful posturing by the former Ecuadorian FM, which prevented progress. The negotiation of terms of reference for the UN study, if it does move forward, is a critical point for protecting and preserving USG interests. Rather than simply focusing on glyphosate, a study that looks carefully into the actual causes of the health problems alleged in the northern border region could help defuse the issue here. We will try to point the Ecuadorians in this direction and request that Washington engage actively with the organizations planning the study to ensure that it is objective.

JEWELL